



**DAWN BUCKINGHAM**  
STATE SENATOR

April 5, 2017

**Statement by Senator Dawn Buckingham on Senate Bill 602  
and the Abilene State Supported Living Center**

I have heard from many constituents from Abilene, and nearby areas of Senate District 24, urging me not to support Senate Bill 602. I heard you. That's why I shared your concerns with the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services this morning, with the following statement:

"Members. I am concerned that Senate Bill 602 will put at risk the viability of one of the most important parts of Senate District 24, which I am proud to represent.

"The Abilene State Supported Living Center (SSLC) has a rich history dating back to the 1890s, and it is vital that it remain open, not just for Abilene or for Senate District 24, but for the State of Texas.

"Senator Hinojosa, while I am sympathetic to the goals of your bill, I am deeply concerned about the potential harm to our state's most vulnerable individuals. For the residents of these facilities and their families, it is imperative that we do more than just direct a state agency to have a transition plan in place. They need to know that their loved one will be able to have the 24/7 care they need to survive. How can we be certain that the closing of any facility won't negatively impact these residents and their families?

"The Abilene SSLC employs more than 1,200 people making it one of the largest employers in the Abilene region, but there are two key points I want to share with this committee:

1. The Abilene SSLC has one of the best ratios of employees per resident of any SSLC in the state. The Abilene SSLC has just 3.7 employees per resident.
2. The Abilene SSLC also has one of the lowest number of cases per resident.

"What these two statistics mean is that the Abilene SSLC is a good steward of taxpayer resources and is providing efficient support for those who are under its care."

While the resident population for SSLC's statewide has decreased from about 13,000 residents at 13 centers across Texas to about 3,000, in SD24 there are currently 3,213 individuals with intellectual developmental disabilities on a waiting list. In other words, services are not keeping



up with residents demands while the cost of residential care keeps growing. In Texas, more than \$1.3 billion is spent each year - or about \$250,000 per resident per year at an SSLC.

These are the real challenges we face in Texas but I remain a staunch supporter of the Abilene SSLC. We will stay vigilant as this bill moves through the process, and we will protect the best SSLC in Texas, Abilene.

The bill was left pending in committee, and as I have repeatedly said, "I will work tirelessly to make sure the Legislature is aware of just how important the Abilene State Supported Living Center is and why it must stay open. Not just for Senate District 24 - but for the State of Texas."

During my last visit to the Big Country, I said "If it's important for Abilene it's important for me." Closing the Abilene SSLC now is not good for Abilene. It's not good for Senate District 24 - and it's not good for Texas.

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